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SELECT

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No sleep 'til Glasto
Dennis Pennis leads the charge



U2
The kings
are dead...



**STADIUM
ROCK
SPECIAL**
Exclusive Interviews

RADIOHEAD
...Long live the kings!



A full-page magazine spread featuring the band Radiohead. The background is a light, neutral color. In the center, Thom Yorke stands with a serious expression, wearing a dark olive-green trench coat over a black t-shirt. The t-shirt has a graphic of a handgun with the text "A REWELL TO ARMS" and "Ozone Community" below it. To his left, in the background, Phil Selway is visible, wearing a black shirt and dark pants, with his hand near his chest. To Thom's right, Ed O'Brien stands with his arms crossed, wearing a dark blue sweater over a light blue shirt. The overall mood is somber and artistic.

Radiohead

Who you gonna call? The 'Head on post-haunted-LP manoeuvres: (l-r) Phil Selway, Jonny Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, Thom Yorke, Colin Greenwood

story by CAITLIN MORAN photos by NEIL COOPER

"Everything was just

"Pop is dead," they once sang. Now, with 'Pop' floundering, Radiohead return with a scary new album of stadium-sized space rock, ready to prove all that 'new U2' chatter correct. The secret? Ganja, ghosts, and several other things that go bump in the night...



“fear”

“C

lever boy,” Thom Yorke says appreciatively, as the rest of the band crowd around the computer. “Very clever. I wonder how he did that?”

Surf’s up on the internet – there are a dozen

unofficial Radiohead websites, but this one appears to have been compiled by the CIA, MI5 and the ghost of Doris Stokes. Work on ‘OK Computer’, Radiohead’s ‘difficult’ third album, has been shrouded in secrecy for the past year.

Nary a rumour nor a squeak has come from the requisite part of Oxfordshire, save bassist Colin Greenwood’s self-deprecating comment that, “It’s gloomy old

uk. We’ve tried other things, but we do like to gloom.” Preview tapes have been limited to five people, and all enquiries to Radiohead’s press office have been met with the words, “We can’t describe it. It’s quite... stoned... but you’ll just have to wait.”

But here on the ‘net, a full two months before ‘OK Computer’ hits HMV, and HMV hits back by displaying it in lovely prominent cardboard display stands, some teenage wired to the mains has got the whole story. Radiohead are looking in wonder as all of ‘OK Computer’ goes scrolling across the screen: lyrics, gossip, chord-changes, the boy Yorke’s analysis of the whole thing, the artwork for the sleeve.

“He must have got it from Japan, but how?” Thom wonders. His hair is brutally shorn, and a rather stern deep brown, but otherwise he still looks like one of Rag Dolly Anna’s friends caught in the middle of a Big Thought. “Christ, you do wonder.”

Ed O’Brien drags on his ‘doobie’, and leans against the wall. “One day, I’m convinced we’re going to be on the internet and we’ll find an option to download an album we haven’t even started recording yet,” he says. “Radiohead fans are very thorough.”

“Do you want to see our official website?” Colin asks. “It hasn’t got anything about the album on it, but there are some rather amusing reviews of the site itself. Everyone hates it.”

“Yeah, look at this,” Jonny

Greenwood says, dialling up the site. “Virtual World said, ‘Do NOT visit this site. It is confusing, garbled rubbish with no nice pictures or anything. Sid died for this?’”

Thom: “Cool.”

Colin: “I think what we’re basically saying on this album, which is borne out by our little sojourn around the virtual world, is that computers are OK.”

The rest of Radiohead: “Hahahahaha.”

one else but me, like it’s seen a ghost/I guess it’s seen the sparks a-flawin’.”

On ‘OK Computer’ Radiohead have hurled themselves at every extreme with no defences up. There’s no irony or distance here, just heartburn and hearts on sleeves. For anyone who’s ever hoped that their favourite band ‘does a Beatles’, and just keeps going further out and further on until the only relationship they have with the current music scene is sending back music postcards that shame their contemporaries, ‘OK Computer’ will be jam for the soul.

“There’s been a lot of looking at headlines and feeling wildly impotent. A lot of the album’s about that”
Thom Yorke

Although there may be a note, or a chord, that supports this theory, ‘OK Computer’ is about a great many things that aren’t computers and the OK-ness thereof. The three main themes that run through it are fear, disaffection and revelation. And while the world and its marketing man was waiting for ‘The Bends 2’, which could be trotted around stadiums until the Earth turned cold, Radiohead have resisted the gravity-tug of the sun and headed into deep space.

‘Climbing Up The Walls’ is a five-minute haunting – a tale of “15 blows to the skull”, panic alarms and creeping evil, with Thom’s voice dissolving into a fearful, blood-clotted scream as Jonny whips the sound of a million dying elephants into a crescendo. The first single, the six-minute-22-second odd-fest that is ‘Paranoid Android’, oozes contempt in spade-loads: from the snarled observation that, “Ambition makes you look very ugly/Kicking squealing Gucci little piggy” to the merry chorus of “The panic/The vomit/The dust and the screaming/The yuppies networking.”

A sense of revelation is there in every note. ‘Airbag’ has Thom escaping a jackknifed juggernaut, and gleefully yelping, “In an interstellar burst I am back to save the universe!”, while the elegiac passion of ‘The Tourist’, which is ‘Everybody Hurts’ on rocket-fuel, finds him confiding that “It barks at no

The main thing that hits you about ‘OK Computer’, however, is its complete unearthliness. It sounds like it was conceived in a black hole, rehearsed in the vacant space between the stars, and recorded in the Mothership that was supposed to be trailing the Hale-Bopp comet.

“Blimey! Well, we drank quite a bit,” drummer Phil Selway offers, bemusedly.

TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF WHAT SOUNDS LIKE A panic/hatred/angel-visitation interface, *Select* has ventured into deepest Oxfordshire to catch the band on a ‘hanging’ day. In the midst of gentle countryside, all shrouded in mellow misty rain, Radiohead have gathered at Colin’s semi. Gaz from Supergrass used to live over the road, and Ed, the

Head’s unfailingly enthusiastic guitarist, has nestled around the corner. One can only presume that the acoustics are mighty fine in this neck of the woods.

All rather fragile from a three-week-hangover” promo-tour of Japan, yet still bright and chipper, Radiohead potter around, indulging in the occasional smoke and slurping tea. Phil is still on a high from the second meeting of the “Phil Is Great” club in Japan. “It’s really touching,” he says. “They only do it because they don’t like anyone to feel left out. We had dinner, they all gave me little presents, and then we played party games.”

Ed – the spiritual brother of Frasier, the polite psychic Mountie from *Due South* – looms around, being tall and handsome. Ed is the sunny faction of Radiohead – he’s the Crowded House fan who drops in the comforting, sweet harmonies to sugar Thom’s more querulous wailings. When Radiohead play live, watch Ed very closely – when he gets very excited about playing his favourite songs, he jumps up and down in a very endearing way. When he’s extremely excited about playing his favourite songs, he falls off the stage.

Jonny and his astonishing bone-structure – it’s a face built entirely on right-angles, clustered around Mick Jagger’s lips – is collapsed on the sofa. Having revealed within ten minutes that he’s against the idea of artistic immortality – “Bach lost things and threw things away: he set the gospels to music and one of them has just ➔



The Oxford baggy revival: Thom contemplates the new LP artwork

disappeared. I rather like that idea. Creating in the moment and not worrying what happens to your music in the future" – and that he is, horrifically enough, beginning to become bored with guitars, he now sits and idly finger-combs his hair.

Older brother Colin, Radiohead's "party faction", is hunting for the ashtray. Colin is a high-IQ version of Hugh Laurie's character in *Blackadder* –



Game, crystal-set and match: top trannies Thom (above) and Jonny tune into Radio Free Expression



he leaks loveliness from every pore, and one senses his eloquent humour is merely to negate people's sense of comparative intellectual smallness. He disputes that there has been a veil of secrecy around 'OK Computer': "It's a desperate bid to stir up a flurry of interest. Our press officer has been pretending we've been in a secret location to whip the press into a frenzy. But for 'secretive', you could replace it with 'the band live in Oxford'. We just haven't been out and about, being 'ace faces' on the scene. Maaan."

And on the other end of the sofa, next to Jonny, is Thom. Still looking like the adorable orphan duckling that asks Augie Doggie "Are you my mummy?" in the Hanna Barbera cartoons, he is

leafing through his notebook. His notoriety, 'awkwardness' is merely shyness, multiplied by intelligence, to the power of awareness that fame, and the music industry, can conspire to leave you bloodless and drained. Today, having been lectured for a tedious two hours about the wonder and glory of 'OK Computer', he's relaxed, friendly and swapping jokes with all corners of the room.

All *Select* can ask him, in a squeaky, excited voice, is: "Do you know how good 'OK Computer' is?"

"No. No I don't. I'm not convinced." He pulls a face. "It makes me laugh, and it annoys me occasionally... it's supposed to offend, and you have to concentrate to listen to it. You can't just pop it on in the background. We did a lot of



perimenting..." He sighs, and stops. "I'm not doing a very good sales job, am I?"

Neither are any of his bandmates. Colin refers to 'OK Computer' as "a cross between Frank Sinatra and Joy Division" and "not a collection of relentlessly upbeat chuckle-tunes", while Jonny reckons it's merely "Radiohead in love with all these brilliant records – DJ Shadow, Miles Davis, Ennio Morricone, Tricky, Supergrass, Górecki and, erm, one little sound off a Genesis album – trying to recreate them, and missing". Ed weighs in with "Troubled Phil Spector – designed to be played in shopping malls."

"To be honest, I'm still tangled up in it – I haven't listened to it since I finished it." Thom

sighs again. "It seems so caught up in that place, where we recorded it. I think I could only listen to it there. But then, I wouldn't want to go back. By the end of recording, I never wanted to see the place again. They didn't want me back."

He looks troubled. He's not talking about the landlords. We'll come back to this one.

HAVING RECORDED 'THE BENDS', RADIOHEAD WENT straight back on tour again: UK, Europe, Japan, US, UK again, European festivals. They were soaking up nuances and influences like a beermat on a bar – dancing on the side of the stage to Massive Attack and Björk; hanging with famously melancholy acoustic troubadours American



Amphitheatre of the absurd: Stipe and Yorke discuss stadium-rock lunacy

Music Club in San Francisco; kicking around and about with Pulp; being adored by REM every time they moved.

When Radiohead played over in Seattle, REM threw a party specially for them – continuing the chummy-bonding malarkey that started when the two bands toured together, and Michael Stipe loved them so much he would drive little radio-controlled cars on to the stage while Thom was trying to play an emotionally charged 'Planet Telex'. Pop stars do have rum ways of expressing their fondness.

"We didn't really realise that loads of people like 'The Bends'," Colin explains. "Tucked away in Oxford, you occasionally see someone in a 'Creep' T-shirt, and that's it. But then we went all round the world and found that loads of people wanted to 'hang' with us because of that album. Which was nice."

During this time, Jonny – the man who once claimed that his mission on earth was to find "the ultimate atonal riff" – put out a message through

Radiohead's official newsletter, asking anyone who had an unusual chord to send it to them. "It was like a *Blue Peter* appeal for music," he giggles. "We wanted to have as many sounds as possible to play with, because there's only really 12 chords, and you do get rather bored of them."

Unfortunately, all the serried ranks of Radiohead fans could come up with was G minor seventh, and a couple of 'uninteresting' variations on a diminished B. Or something technical like that. So ➡



The lost incontinence of Alanis: "We only did it for the money," claim the 'Head

Jonny's thirst for new sounds had to be assuaged with whacking a bagpipe, and fucking up his guitar with little buttons and hooks.

Although many of the tracks on 'OK Computer' were being played live two years ago – 'No Surprises', 'Paranoid Android', 'Climbing Up The Walls' – it was on a US tour supporting Alanis Morissette that the mood of the album took hold.

"We only did the Alan Morris tour because it was silly money and it gave us a chance to work out everything live," Colin explains. "That, and the strangely perverse kick out of being these five men in black, scaring pre-pubescent American girls with our own brand of Dark Music. 'Paranoid Android' used to have this appalling ten-minute Brian Auger Hammond solo at the end of it, which went on and on, with Jonny just jamming. We'd beg him not to do it. That was quite full-on. There'd be little children crying at the end, begging their parents to take them home."

Playing to half-empty arenas decorated with enormous posters of the horse-faced one seemed to resolve any lingering doubts the band had about going full-out and making the album as wired and dark as they could. Colin tactfully disagrees, however.

"I don't think you could say that 'OK Computer' is a reaction against the crass commercialism of the most successful solo artist in the world at the moment and her music. It's a desperate bid on our behalf to emulate that crass commercialism, which I think we've singularly failed to do."

By the end of the tour, Radiohead were burning to get into the studio. With the freedom to record pretty much anywhere in the world, they initially decided to decamp to the South of France, to enjoy the wine and moan about getting inappropriate tans. However, when Colin and Thom stumbled

across a huge Elizabethan mansion, stranded in the middle of a deserted valley just outside Bath, they decided to do "the whole Led Zep thing" and up sticks to Avon.

With massive private gardens, all oddly formal yet strangely spooky – "like the gardens in *Alice In Wonderland*, when they're playing croquet with the flamingoes" – and a palace to explore, Radiohead started to kick back and have some fun. Appropriately, croquet became a big passion, with the Croquet Olympics extending well into the evening. Tankers of fine wine and bags of very good weed were drafted into the area, and dinners were held in the candle-lit dining hall – "Just to up the

Deep Purple rockin'-in-the-mansion vibe," Colin giggles.

However, after shuttling around the world for two years, with the roar of crowds, whine of feed-back, 'boom' of aeroplanes, and mid-town traffic filtering into hotel bedrooms as constant background noise, the sudden silence seems to have unnerved Thom. "It was quiet – really fucking quiet," he shivers. "Time stood completely still. The first week we were down there we didn't leave the house at all, and after a while, it started feeling like we were on this little island separate from the rest of the universe. I'd go for walks around the gardens, listening to all this music pouring out of the house in the dark, and in the background you'd hear horny vixens yowling, which is scary as hell. And I started to feel a bit... uneasy."

Still, the group played on – with Phil recording his drum parts in a deserted child's bedroom full of fluffy toys, and a lunar eclipse affording much opportunity for cricked necks and philosophical, stoned chats. As Thom wasn't sleeping at all, he spent a lot of time surfing the internet until someone traced his address and started bugging him. The lyrics to 'Fitter Happier' (spoken by a Hawtrey-esque virtual voice), with its relentless, gran honesty and troubling pay-off of "*Calm/Fitter, healthier and more productive/A pig/In a cage/On antibiotics*", started as a story posted on the internet at 4am. But still he was restless.

'OK Computer' sounds haunted, *Select* offers, trying to get to the bottom of its otherworldly air. There's a very odd presence on the album – the music sounds completely unaware of time and space. You sound like something's passing through you.

Thom's face sparks, then looks startled. "Well, yes. It did, it was. It was, um... I think what I'm trying to say is that I'm amazed that that's come across. That mindset."

He stops again. "Weird shit had been happening – the tapes would stop and start, rewind, record.

We had them serviced, but it still happened."

Ghosty-things? Thom speaks very carefully.

"I was there with Danny, who does our artwork, and we were hearing things and seeing things all over the place. We did the album over two separate sessions, and the second time we went back there, the house didn't want us back at all. Of course, it's all probably my imagination and the fact I was stoned... and I don't want this written up like, Oooohhh, 'OK Computer' was recorded in a haunted house, because we'd already established the mood of the album before we went there, and it already sounded... haunted. You know – we just picked that house because it looked lovely and we wanted to record somewhere we'd be happy. But for me, personally, it affected me a lot."

He looks up with carefully neutral eyes.

"You absorb the atmosphere around you, and I... we made jokes about it, but, wherever it was coming from, there was fear everywhere.

"Everything was just fear – coming out of ➡

"When we started recording, the house became like a swamp, and we were stuck in it. It took me by the ankles and shook me until there was nothing left"
Thom Yorke



the walls and floors. And whether we brought that fear, or we caught the fear, or whether it was just the drugs, I don't know. But when we started recording, they came out. Very strange spirits. The house became like a swamp, and we were stuck in it. It took me by the ankles and shook me until there was nothing left. There was a very claustrophobic ghost... And that's why I can't really listen to the album at the moment. I don't really want to remember that time in any great detail."

Other than the spooks that play unseen vibe-generators on the album, there's also a huge feeling of disaffection and impatient revulsion with most of the world. Man. Thom nods happily, and explains that 'The Bends' cleared most of the "psychic custard" (© Julian Cope) that had been troubling him, and that after its release, he felt stronger and filled with energy.

"But then I'd come home, right, and put the telly on, and there'd be all these fucking irons and fridges coming at you." Thom warms to his theme. "Watching some Tory MP in the South East, shaking hands, electioneering. And then someone threw eggs at him, which was necessary and good, but I was sitting there thinking, 'Whoah, I've seen this once too often.' There's been a lot of looking at headlines and feeling wildly impotent. A lot of the album's about that."

Reading Will Hutton's *The State We're In* and Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age Of Extremes* (a shortish history of the current century) seems to have shifted Thom's outlook from Rock The Vote to Fuck The Vote.

"Yeah, we supported Rock The Vote, but because of the way the whole political system works, it does seem rather odd to be choosing between one unworkable, outdated system and another. We need to go beyond that – because at the moment, it's just Cowboys and Indians. And the whole myth around economics I find fascinating. It's this century's biggest myth."

We can only presume that Thom is referring to the economic 'supremacy' of the First World, which is just as in debt as the Third World, but kept afloat by the fact that it owns all the banks the Third World is in debt to. Rock 'n' roooooooll.

After the album was finished, the group scattered – Colin "popped over" to New Zealand to visit his sister, Jonny toured around Italy, staying in crummy hotels and checking out the prehistoric graffiti: "It's all Quitas loves Octavia, and

horribly touching." They reconvened for a sp... i partying – an awards ceremony in Ireland afforded the chance to meet U2 and scare Ash.

"Oh, that was a drinking night," Colin recalls. "I was sat next to Larry Mullen,

Jekyll and hides: schizophrenic Radiohead display bizarrely beleathered mod/Gestapo crossover



...which I thought rather odd – you'd think the people who did the seating plan would put him next to someone who knew something about U2. He was pleasant – passed me my beer when I was too drunk to get it myself, and I figured he must have had a lot of practice in getting drunken bass players a beer. It was a very Adam Clayton moment."

Hugging the floors and carrying their bottles, Radiohead crawled onstage to receive the 'Best Gig In Ireland' trophy from Ulrika Jonsson. Thom and Ed rambled drunkenly for five minutes, left the award onstage, then lost the award under the table. In a similar state of inebriation, Tim Wheeler from Ash introduced himself to Thom with the opening gambit, "Do you like rock 'n' roll?"

"And to his horror, Thom just looked at him in a mad way and left the room," Colin recounts. "Of course, the poor little soul didn't know that Thom went upstairs and proceeded to vomit all over his hotel room and then pass out for ten hours. Thom was a man with a mission that night."

Then it was on to Japan, for promotion of 'OK Computer'. On Ed's birthday, the band 'treated' him to an evening of karaoke, with Ed "giving it some Barry Manilow", and Thom reducing the whole club to tears with an impassioned version of 'What A Wonderful World'. However, in the swimmy mists of the next day's hangover, the first seeds of worry were sown. Most of the people they talked to thought 'OK Computer' was hugely depressing, and impossible to headbang to. The gameplan that everyone had assumed for the band – that they would release 'The Bends 2' and swiftly become bigger than U2 – was ruined.

"Obviously we want to be heard by as many people as possible," Ed explains. "All that small-is-beautiful stuff is bollocks. But we're still only three albums into our career – U2 didn't start selling loads until they were four albums in. We're still in the experimental, restless stage."

"'OK Computer' isn't the album we're going to rule the world with," Colin agrees. "It's not as hit-g-everything-loudly-whilst-wagging-the-tongue-in-and-out, like 'The Bends'. There's less of the Van Halen factor."

"I've been horrified to find people think it's depressing," Ed groans. "I think we all find that melancholy can be uplifting; that there's an adrenaline rush to be had in hitting the bottom and trying to fight your way back up."

"It seemed to take about nine months for people to 'get' 'The Bends', so it'll be about... two years before they get this one," Thom laughs ruefully. "We'll be pretty poor by then."

Even 'The Bends' was a bit too intense for some people – Radio 1 virtually ignored it. But Radiohead are so big now that they'll have to playlist 'Paranoid Android' – they must have

"The 'Paranoid Android' single is difficult. Especially when people find out it's about the fall of the Roman Empire. America is at the point the Roman Empire was just before it collapsed" Thom Yorke

"I'm so glad they're getting more radio play than us"

– a full guide to those post-'Bends' bands with Ed O'Brien



TRAVIS

Went Radiohead max with debut 45 'All I Want To Do Is Rock'.

Then pop-goon crazy with 'U16 Girls'. Are now re-releasing '...Rock'. "I liked the last single, Colin rates them live. I refuse to judge a band on it's first couple of releases – y'know, heaven forfend anyone should judge us on 'Pablo Honey'. We were in hock to Dinosaur Jr and The Pixies up to our eyeballs."



MANSUN

Man in grey suit takes advantage of post-'Bends' lull to do horrible things to music. Except for 'Wide Open Space', which was great. "Ahh, I thought 'Wide Open Space' was in the running for best single of last year. They've got loads of ideas and they don't sound like us at all. They're supposed to be part of that New Grave thing with us and the Manics, aren't

they? Everything that article suggested was true – we all did have long overcoats and dodgy haircuts in the '80s."



JOCASTRA

Third-rate bluster with whiny vocals, guaranteed to make you feel ever-so-slightly murderous. As the fella in the Tango advert puts it – 'Stin-ky wind!' "Ah, well, I don't really like these. This sounds like a muso thing, but it's not – their production's so lazy. Using strings has been done to death, and if they've got no other ideas at this stage... [Doubtfully] They could get better, I suppose."



WIRELESS

You may recall the episode of *The Young Ones* where Rik is hoping to impress his lecturer: "Hello Dr Morrison – I've got a pair of yellow dungarees, like the ones you've got!" Wireless are wearing Radiohead's

dungarees. "I haven't heard these. The name evokes thoughts of radios, though, doesn't it?"



STRANGELOVE

Gothic-rock guitar heroes, and contenders for 'most underrated band in UK' prize. "Ah, well, in this case, Radiohead are definitely post-Strangelove – we toured with them for 'Pop Is Dead' and we changed quite a lot after that. They were inspirational. Apart from their trousers. Patrick had an awful pair of baggy trackie bottoms."



SUBCIRCUS

Men discover 'some stadium rock' in the street, then try to recreate it in Dingwalls every night. Promising. "I heard them on *The Evening Session* and I thought they sounded fantastic. I've listened to the album a coupla times, and I still can't hear that they sound like us, not at all."

known that as they were recording it. As it's every great, radio-unfriendly rock moment from the past 20 years all welded together, were they not being gleefully perverse? Simon Mayo will have hives when they go into the choirboy-at-a-funeral bit.

"Heh heh heh," Thom chuckles, like Muttley out of *Dastardly And Muttley*. "Heh heh heh. There's no swearing on it, though."

You still have time to recall all those CD singles and rename it 'Paranoid C***fucker'...

"It's going to be difficult enough as it is," Thom says, gathering his coat around him. "Especially when people find out that it's about the fall of the Roman Empire. There's a friend of mine, in a band in America,

who says that America is at the point now where the Roman Empire was, just before it collapsed. And I haven't been able to see it the same way since. It's just true – everywhere you go, the place is just about to go like that."

Thom mimes the economical and political destruction of the US with his hand, and then sighs. "There go our sales in America."

We can leave that quote out, if you wish...

"Nah nah nah, I don't care. It'll give our accountant something to think about."

IT MIGHT TAKE A WHILE FOR PEOPLE TO 'GET' 'OK Computer', but if received wisdom had its way, they'd still be encoring their Vegas-slot with 'Creep'. Besides, this album – their most astonishing to date – should be a breeze to sell compared to the next one. Radiohead say they intend to throw away all their instruments and stitch the whole thing together with samples.

For now, though, they've found that elusive sixth gear on the Monster Truck of Rock – and they're revving the mutha... **S**